

## 1 Scope

- 1.1 This policy outlines Aster's approach to managing our empty homes. Aster defines an empty home as a property that is currently empty and a tenancy or licence has ended, but a new one has not begun.
- 1.2 This policy aims to minimise the time a home is empty, maximise value for money, meet customer expectations and ensure we meet statutory requirements. As rent is not due when a home is empty, this is a loss to our income and therefore the aim is to keep this loss to a minimum whilst ensuring the property is made ready-to-let to the required Lettable Standard as quickly as possible.
- 1.3 This policy applies to all rental properties owned or managed by Aster.
- 1.4 Empty homes may occur when a tenancy is terminated by the customer, a property is abandoned and Aster has taken steps to end the tenancy, an eviction has occurred and we have taken back possession of the property, a licence is brought to an end and the property is returned to us, or a tenant has passed away and there are no succession rights so the tenancy must be brought to an end..
- 1.5 Our Lettable Standard sets the specific requirements that our homes must be at before they are ready to let. There may be different standards depending on the type of property, e.g. sheltered, general needs, or private rent properties.
- 1.6 This policy is applied in conjunction with our Lettings Policy, which aims to ensure the best use of the property by letting to the most suitable applicant, and our Lettable Standard, which sets out the standard the homes will be at before we let them.

## 2 Policy Statement

- 2.1 We will ensure we minimise loss of rental income as a result of empty homes.
- 2.2 We will advise customers of their responsibilities when moving out, as outlined and supported by their tenancy agreement, through correspondence and pre-termination visits to ensure properties are returned to Aster in reasonable condition for void works to be completed. We will document these inspections with photos and/or file notes as required. For more information please see our Customer Handbook on our [Website](#).
- 2.3 We will ensure properties meet our Lettable Standard before customers move in.
- 2.4 We will conduct a thorough inspection after void works are completed so the property can be made available to the Lettings team.
- 2.5 We will ensure empty homes are re-let in line with our Lettings Policy.
- 2.6 We will only usually allow customers transferring within Aster's stock to do so when a satisfactory property inspection has been completed and their current home is in a reasonable condition. We will take exceptional circumstances into account if a customer is unable to bring their property up to standard.

- 2.7 We will encourage a transfer if this makes sure the homes allocated meet the tenants needs and minimise unmet housing needs across our stock. We can do this by supporting customers with housing applications and Homeswapper registration, and ensuring direct lets are widely advertised.
- 2.8 If a tenant passes away, we recognise this could be a difficult time for their family and friends and will work with them as necessary to make sure there are no preventable delays returning the empty home to Aster.
- 2.9 We may require adaptations for a new customer to be installed before they are able to move in. If this is the case, we will require the customer to sign a tenancy agreement prior to works commencing. Conversely, it may be more suitable for the customer to move into the property and we will complete the works once they have moved in.
- 2.10 If the property is not left empty and in a reasonable condition, we reserve the right to bring the property up to standard and recharge the outgoing tenant the cost of the works as a result of damage or neglect, in line with our Recharge Policy. This would not cover rental loss during the period the home is empty.
- 2.11 Void works that are due to reasonable wear and tear will not be rechargeable.
- 2.12 We will ensure customers who have been allocated to the empty home are kept fully informed about any works required and their expected move in date.
- 2.13 When a home becomes empty, we will have consideration for options appraisal or disposal before commencing void works and looking to re-let. Our Asset management team manages identifying which properties should be flagged as part of our void disposal programme.
- 2.14 We will ensure we comply with our insurance requirements If major void works are required and/or a home is empty for an extended amount of time. This could include securing the property, conducting visits or inspections, or draining tanks or heating systems.
- 2.15 If a customer is unhappy with how we have dealt with our empty homes, including how the property has been re-let, we will initially refer them to the Void Surveyor who may need to visit to investigate the issue. If the customer is still unhappy, we will look to resolve the issue in line with our Complaints Policy.
- 2.16 The voids surveyors, operatives, and lettings team are responsible primarily for the implementation of this policy.

### **3 Monitoring and Review**

- 3.1 This policy will be monitored through colleague one-to-ones and Key Performance indicators including average days to re-let, refusals & rejections, termination reasons, % of first offers taken, and void rent loss.
- 3.2 The policy will be reviewed 6 months post implementation by the Policy, Compliance and Training team.
- 3.3 The Customer Experience Panel will seek assurance on the effectiveness of the policy 12 months after implementation.

- 3.4 The policy will be reviewed every 3 years as standard, unless a change in legislation, regulation or business need prompts an earlier review.
- 3.5 We will monitor customer feedback and lessons learnt from complaints.

## 4 Related Policies and Procedures

- 4.1 Lettable Standard
- 4.2 Lettings Policy
- 4.3 Tenancy Policy
- 4.4 Lettings Procedure
- 4.5 Complaints Policy
- 4.6 Estate Management Policy
- 4.7 Honesty Policy
- 4.8 Aids & Adaptation Policy
- 4.9 Customer Handbook

5 Governance			
<b>Effective From:</b>	01/10/2020	<b>Expires:</b>	30/09/2023
<b>Policy Owner:</b>	Regional Director - Hampshire & Wiltshire		
<b>Policy Author:</b>	Policy & Compliance Officer		
<b>Approved by:</b>	<i>Customer Community Network</i>		
<b>Delegation Matrix Reference:</b>	R097	<b>Version Number:</b>	v1.0